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# Student Attitudes and Usage of the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP)

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# Student Attitudes and Usage of the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP)

## **Abstract**

*[From the introduction]*

Since 1961, food stamps, currently known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, have been assisting low-income households (Timeline). SNAP gives low-income households the ability to increase their food expenditures, curbing fears of food insecurity. With the Food and Agriculture Act of 1977, the program expanded to include full-time post-secondary students. To qualify, a student must have a federal work study job (FWS) or work at least 20 hours a week (Johnson). Student usage remained low and largely unnoticed until the last decade, when several state governments experienced sharp increases in participation. Tight budgets are forcing governments to make cuts; and it is important that inefficiencies are cut out of programs to maximize program success. Low income students should continue to receive benefits as SNAP seemingly provides a two-pronged benefit: On one side helping students afford healthy, well rounded meals, while simultaneously making college more affordable.

The student population possesses several qualities distinguishing them from other SNAP recipients, as many students come from affluent families, and only temporarily reside in low-income households. Other students lack the education necessary to make proper dietary choices, resulting in the purchase of high caloric items with poor nutritional values. The goal of SNAP is to increase nutrition, not to allow participants to splurge on items such as sweetened beverages, snack food, and entertainment. SNAP's connection to FWS also mitigates some of the concerns about the program: FWS directly targets low-income families, with monthly benefits reducing the need of student loans and the fear of future debt. This increases the appeal of attending college, making SNAP a useful tool for increasing student food expenditures, improving dietary outcomes, and making college more affordable.

To research the question of whether or not students should continue receiving benefits an anonymous survey of Pacific University students was conducted. The survey asked questions revolving around food security, food expenditures, college affordability, health habits, and personal attitudes towards student usage of SNAP. Sample averages were then compared between three subgroups: those currently participating in SNAP, those eligible and not participating, and those ineligible. The study concluded that SNAP participants were a needy population, did not abuse program benefits, and increased the affordability of college. An expanded analysis is presented throughout the reading; beginning with the background of SNAP as a whole, an expanded methodology section, and then a presentation of the comprehensive results and analysis.

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***Student Attitudes and Usage of the Supplemental Nutritional  
Assistance Program (SNAP)***

By: Quin Moore

Pacific University

May 7th 2014

**Intro:**

Since 1961, food stamps, currently known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, have been assisting low-income households (Timeline). SNAP gives low-income households the ability to increase their food expenditures, curbing fears of food insecurity. With the Food and Agriculture Act of 1977, the program expanded to include full-time post-secondary students. To qualify, a student must have a federal work study job (FWS) or work at least 20 hours a week (Johnson). Student usage remained low and largely unnoticed until the last decade, when several state governments experienced sharp increases in participation. Tight budgets are forcing governments to make cuts; and it is important that inefficiencies are cut out of programs to maximize program success. Low income students should continue to receive benefits as SNAP seemingly provides a two-pronged benefit: On one side helping students afford healthy, well rounded meals, while simultaneously making college more affordable.

The student population possesses several qualities distinguishing them from other SNAP recipients, as many students come from affluent families, and only temporarily reside in low-income households. Other students lack the education necessary to make proper dietary choices, resulting in the purchase of high caloric items with poor nutritional values. The goal of SNAP is to increase nutrition, not to allow participants to splurge on items such as sweetened beverages, snack food, and entertainment. SNAP's connection to FWS also mitigates some of the concerns about the program: FWS directly targets low-income families, with monthly benefits reducing the need of student loans and the fear of future debt. This increases the appeal of attending college, making SNAP a useful tool for increasing student food expenditures, improving dietary outcomes, and making college more affordable.

To research the question of whether or not students should continue receiving benefits an anonymous survey of Pacific University students was conducted. The survey asked questions revolving around food security, food expenditures, college affordability, health habits, and personal attitudes towards student usage of SNAP. Sample averages were then compared between three subgroups: those currently participating in SNAP, those eligible and not participating, and those ineligible. The study concluded that SNAP participants were a needy population, did not abuse program benefits, and increased the affordability of college. An expanded analysis is presented throughout the reading; beginning with the background of SNAP as a whole, an expanded methodology section, and then a presentation of the comprehensive results and analysis.

**Background:**

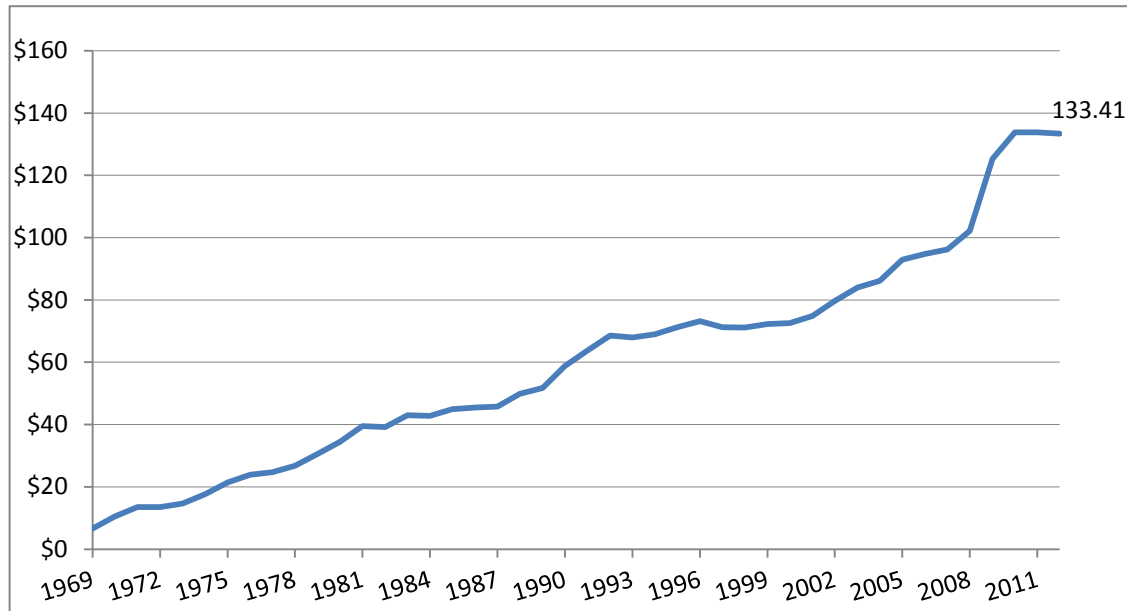
SNAP has become the nation's second biggest welfare program, ranking only behind Medicare. Typically, research is done on households as a whole, focusing on those with the elderly or children. The USDA does not specifically track student participation and only reports on wide age groups, such as 18-35. In 2012, those 18-35 made up 22.8% of all users, with college students making up an even smaller portion (USDA). Professor Phillip Trostel, of the University of Maine, uses the Current Population Survey to estimate that in 2010, of those 18-35, 15% were aged 18-24. Monica Vendituoli (2013) of USA Today, cites Phillip Trostel as well, estimating that SNAP usage, by the student population has almost doubled over the past ten years, with an increase from 5.4% to 12.5%. This has caused a bigger strain on state budgets, with some, notably Michigan (who removed 30,000 students from the program), tightening eligibility requirements (Vendituoli). Research needs to be done to determine if this is correct policy action, or if cuts should be made in other inefficient sectors.

SNAPs primary goal is to increase nutritional outcomes (Policy Basics). Research has been done on student health with concerning results. Many students lack fruit and vegetable intake, with one primary consumption barrier being income. Other students lack nutrition education, while some simply lack the motivation to look beyond unhealthy vending machines and dining halls. Cliché's such as "the freshman fifteen" give student's a poor reputation, and it appears as if students could benefit from food assistance (Dinger, Waigandt 1997). Additionally, average published tuition and fees at private nonprofit four-year institutions, adjusted for inflation, rose by 153% over the last 30 years (College Board). These rising costs make it difficult for low-income families to afford college and associated expenses such as groceries.

A 2006 study, of 1,367 community college students, by Steven Shive and Michelle Morris, indicated the biggest barriers to fruit and vegetable consumption were: convenience, as many students lacked access at work or school; shelf-life, as fruit spoils faster than many students can eat, and income, as some students had to cut back on meals due to strained budgets. In their conclusion, Shive and Morris recommend nutrition education and SNAP usage as possible solutions to the problem. SNAP provides a monthly income helping students afford nutritious purchases; and combined with nutrition education, can give students resources to cook homemade, well-rounded, healthy meals.

The average benefit paid per recipient has steadily risen, reaching \$133.41 in 2012, as seen in figure 2 below. This has led to households' ability to rely more on food assistance, decreasing food insecurity and increasing nutrition intake. Some students can receive up to \$200 in monthly SNAP benefits, totaling up to \$2,400 in benefits a year. Compare this to the \$2,000 a

**Figure 1: Average benefit per person (2012 Dollars) 1969-2012 Source: USDA, 2012**



student can receive a year for FWS and the aid becomes significant (Johnson).

One fear of the program was that, although food insecurity among low-income households was decreasing, their nutrition intake remained poor. Several studies connected obesity to SNAP participation, and although these likely suffered from reverse causality, as poverty may cause both outcomes, the USDA took notice (McGeary, 2009). In 1994 the USDA “commenced a program called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Education.” (SNAP-ed) was designed to increase nutritional awareness and promote healthy-lifestyles among low-income families (McGeary). But the initial program had minimal state participation, with only five States applying for and receiving optional funding for nutrition education activities. Clearly SNAP-ed was not promoting its four goals: “dietary quality, food security, food safety,



and shopping behavior/food resource management”, and the criticism continued. In 1998 there was a “renewed” federal commitment to nutrition education, and by 2007, all 52 states were participating (SNAP and Nutrition). Program design and requirements have practically remained unchanged since. Representatives speak proudly of payment accuracy, and state that even with participation rates at all-time highs, in 2011 “The share of SNAP payments representing overpayments, underpayments, or payments to ineligible households have reached record lows” (Rosenbaum). SNAP routinely proves itself to be one of the most successful welfare programs in reducing associated stigma and increasing participation rates among eligible demographics.

As stated earlier, there is no nationwide data on student participation, but the USDA does keep track of participation by age group. The subgroups are vague and don’t go back many years; with data only available after 2006 for those under 18, 18 – 35, 35-59, and over 59. The age group for college students is 18-24, so 18-35 does not represent a realistic picture. In 2012, of the 22.8% of recipients aged 18-35, only a smaller, unknown portion, are College students (USDA). We want to know if the low error rate of payments applies to the student population as well.

As previously mentioned, students actively employed in a FWS position, automatically qualify for SNAP. To qualify for FWS, students must be full-time and demonstrate financial need. This is not a clear cut process, as exemplified by Clifford Johnson from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities when he writes, “To be eligible for a FWS award, a student must demonstrate a need for financial assistance in order to meet the costs of attending the institution. The size of such an award is determined after considering the expected family contribution toward the cost of college attendance, the student's income and resources, and other sources of financial aid available to the student”. There may be students who demonstrate need but do not

receive aid, and if students fail to make progress towards graduation they may have their aid revoked. Basically, there does not seem to be a clear-cut definition of who qualifies for FWS, leaving plenty of room for error payments. The survey described in the following sections attempt to gain a further understanding of student SNAP usage, determine if eligible students are being targeted properly, and whether or not the abuse benefits. Abuse is a term up for interpretation; but in this aspect abuse implies using benefits to purchase high volumes of unhealthy food items (Such as frozen meals, snack food, etc.) and using benefits to indirectly finance weekend partying and entertainment.

### **Methodology:**

To analyze the effects of SNAP on student outcomes; students from selected classes at Pacific University were surveyed. Pacific University is a small liberal arts college, with 1783 undergraduate students. 8 classes were surveyed overall with 160 total responses. The survey instrument consisted of a variety of questions focused around food security, food expenditures, consumption, and college affordability. After participants completed the survey, results were collected in an envelope, coded, and analyzed comparing sample averages of SNAP users, eligible non-users, and those not eligible. The survey form is attached at the end of this empirical paper for reference.

A general recruitment letter was sent to Pacific University Professors, asking permission to use ten minutes of their class time. The survey was then given to the classes of willing professors. Participation was voluntary and anonymous; with students under the age of 18 excluded from the survey to minimize outliers and to meet IRB regulations. A brief description

of the project was given along with a consent form, and an opportunity for students to ask questions.

It is expected that SNAP users will have higher food expenditures and an easier time affording college compared to eligible non-participants. Those ineligible for SNAP may have similar food expenditures and ease of affording college due to the likelihood of an affluent family. If SNAP users spend more money on entertainment and eat less healthy compared to non-users it should be expected eligibility requirements be tightened for college students. These questions along with several others will be explored to examine differences between the three groups. Pacific University is a small liberal arts college consisting of 1,783 undergraduates, while the survey consisted of 56% men, 44% women, with an average age of 20.4 years.

While the study was strong in many aspects; as the survey instrument was well balanced, free of bias, and surveyed almost 10% of Pacific University undergraduates, there were several limitations to the study. The number one limitation was the lack of responses by SNAP users; only 21 of all responders currently received benefits, while 65 additional respondents were eligible to receive benefits. Although the sample averages showed some significant discrepancies between the three sub-groups, it is important to weigh those results carefully, remembering the sample size of SNAP users was quite small. Additionally, several participants seemed unaware of SNAP, impacting their responses to several questions. Classroom selection was also an issue: Although classes from multiple disciplines were surveyed, there was an overwhelming amount of responses from business majors (61 out of 160). This is due to my relationship with professors in my discipline who were more likely to allow class participation. This could result in some sample selection bias, as business majors may have a unique view on SNAP usage and college affordability.

In future studies the recruiting process should be expanded to recruit SNAP participants specifically. If more resources are available it would be important to expand the study to state universities, community colleges, and other liberal arts colleges. It would also be important to include questions on specific monetary amounts spent on food, rather than simply percentages. Even with these limitations the responses as a whole give us a meaningful look into student dietary preferences, spending habits and ease of college affordability.

### **Results:**

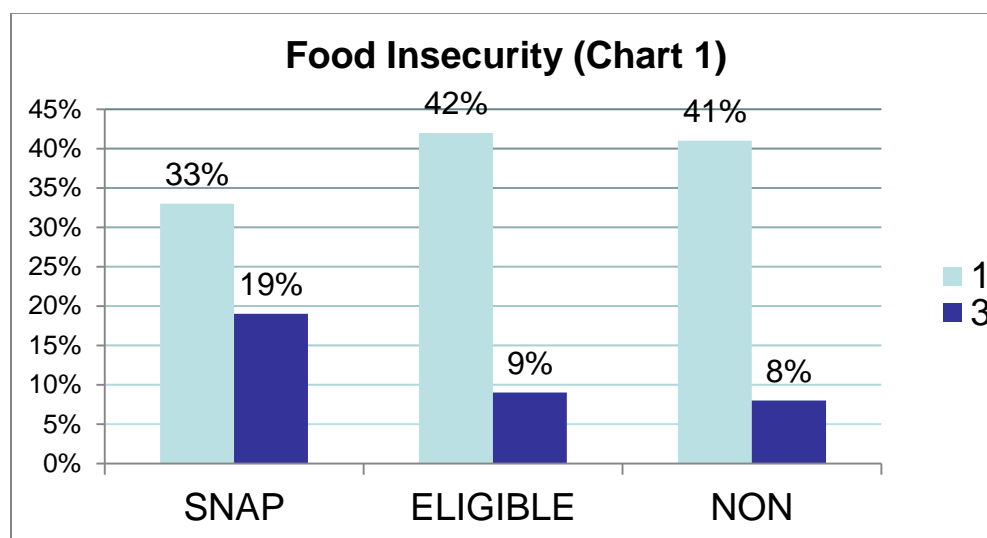
Initial comparisons of Sample averages between SNAP vs. non participants showed SNAP participants were twice as likely to report not having enough to eat, spent less money on entertainment and fast food, with 90% of recipients stating program benefits influenced their diet and make college more affordable. Additionally over 50% of recipients sensed a stigma with SNAP usage. These results indicate those who have difficulty affording food are more likely to participate in SNAP, do not use program benefits to increase spending on entertainment and fast food, yet still suffer from a slight stigma. Complete survey results are displayed throughout this section, starting with table 1 below.

<b>Table 1:</b>	<b>SNAP</b>	<b>NON</b>	<b>ELIGIBLE</b>
<b>Please Respond to the following</b>	<b>Y</b>	<b>Y</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Do you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there isn't enough money for food?</b>	43%	22%	22%
<b>Do you ever eat less than you felt you should because there isn't enough money for food?</b>	62%	24%	25%
<b>Do you buy most of the food for your household?</b>	67%	39%	42%
<b>Do you keep track of your food budget?</b>	81%	54%	49%

These results show SNAP participants are more likely to eat less and suffer from food insecurity compared to non-participants. The most notable result is presented in question 2, with

almost 3 times as SNAP participants stating they eat less because they didn't have enough money for food. One interesting note is 81% of SNAP participants kept track of their food budget compared to 54% and 49% of the other sub-groups. This shows an enhanced awareness of food budgeting, reflecting their greater need. Non-participants, with many coming from affluent families, don't feel the need to budget because they rarely worry about running out of funds. Additionally you can see eligible non-participants have very similar results to those ineligible. This is a reflection of eligible students not participating unless they genuinely need the assistance. The next question on the survey digs deeper into the issue of student food security and dietary preferences and is presented below in table 2. Highlights of the table are displayed in chart 1 also shown below.

<b>Table 2: Which statement best describes the food you eat?</b>	<b>SNAP</b>	<b>NON</b>	<b>ELIGIBLE</b>
<b>(1) I have enough of the kinds of food I wanted to eat.</b>	33%	41%	42%
<b>(2) I have enough to eat, but not always the kinds of food I want.</b>	48%	47%	48%
<b>(3) Sometimes I don't have enough to eat.</b>	19%	8%	9%
<b>(4) Often I don't have enough to eat.</b>	0%	3%	2%



Although the two groups scored very similar in question number 2, twice as many SNAP participants stated they sometimes didn't have enough to eat while more non participants stated they always have enough to eat. This result is consistent to findings in previous literature, which showed SNAP participation only increased food consumption by as little as 17 cents on the dollar (Fox). In the case of Pacific University, many SNAP participants still don't have enough to eat; reflecting their low income status. This shows the program is targeting a needy population and the fact that SNAP benefits alone does not ensure sufficient nutrition.

Table 3 is presented next; with more questions concerning food security. This section questions student's ability to prepare well balanced healthy foods and how much students rely on the convenience of fast food to supplement their diets.

Table 3	Never (1)			Rarely (2)			Sometimes (3)			Often (4)			Average		
For these statements, please indicate whether the statement is never, rarely, sometimes, or often true for you.	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE
The food that I buy just doesn't last, and I don't have money to get more.	0%	32%	32%	38%	36%	29%	57%	28%	34%	0%	1%	5%	2.48	1.99	2.11
I can't afford to eat balanced meals.	5%	51%	38%	52%	30%	35%	33%	14%	18%	5%	4%	8%	2.29	1.71	1.95
I worry about whether my food will run out before I get money to buy more.	0%	49%	38%	38%	35%	35%	52%	8%	22%	5%	7%	5%	2.52	1.74	1.92
I want to eat healthy, but fast food is much more convenient.	14%	30%	25%	52%	24%	31%	19%	30%	32%	10%	15%	12%	2.14	2.30	2.32

For the first three questions, SNAP participant's average answer was higher than non-participants. These three questions all addressed food security; showing that program beneficiaries still suffer from food insecurity at a higher rate than the general population. The average answer for SNAP participants on the third question is 2.52; meaning the average answer fell between rarely worrying about running out of food and sometimes worrying. Non participants averaged a 1.74 and 1.92, falling between never worrying and rarely worrying.

These results also showed that non-participants are more likely to eat fast food. This proves certain critics wrong; as it appears that SNAP does not free up funds for Pacific University students to spend on fast food. There continued to be signs of food insecurity among SNAP recipients with 57% stating that sometimes they ran out of food and couldn't afford more. On a positive note, no participants had this happen often, showing signs of program success. Signs of food insecurity begin to emerge among other populations with 28 percent of ineligible students and 34% of eligible non-participants stating their food didn't last long enough. One would expect the 34% eligible to apply for SNAP, although it is possible they are unaware of the program. The following table, table 4, shows detailed reports on food consumption broken down into food categories. This question attempts to detail if SNAP users consume healthier diets than non-users, or if they purchase cheap food in an attempt to make their food purchases stretch longer. Chart 2 highlights some discrepancies between the subgroups diets.

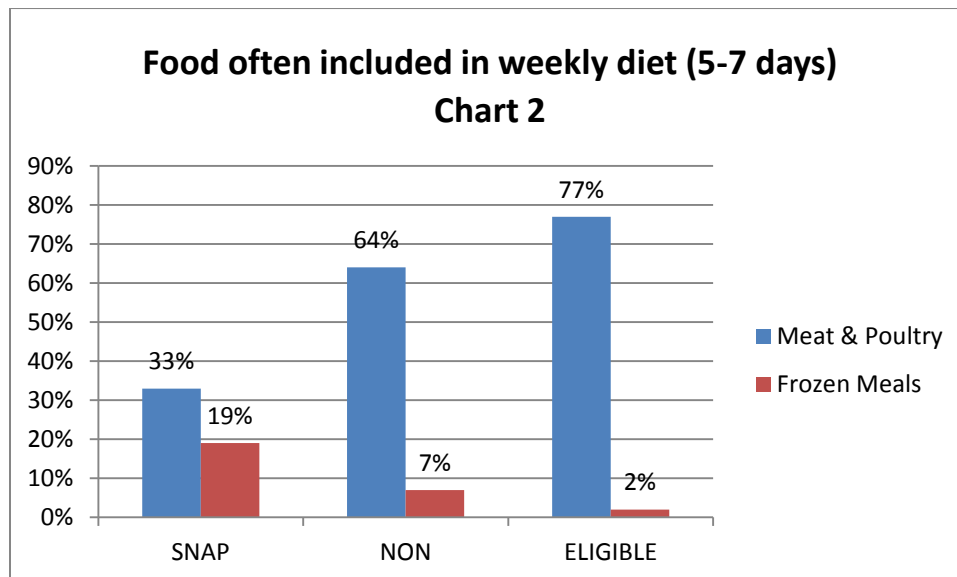


Table 4	Never (1)			Rarely (2)			Sometimes			Often			Average		
How many days in a typical week does your diet include the following:	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE
Milk	24%	11%	14%	14%	14%	17%	24%	24%	23%	38%	51%	46%	2.76	3.16	3.02
Cheese	14%	9%	5%	19%	14%	17%	33%	38%	45%	29%	39%	34%	2.67	3.07	3.08
Breads (Bagels, Pita Bread, Wheat, etc.)	5%	1%	6%	0%	12%	9%	43%	32%	29%	52%	54%	55%	3.43	3.39	3.34
Meat and Poultry	5%	3%	3%	19%	7%	2%	43%	27%	18%	33%	64%	77%	3.05	3.51	3.69
Seafood	29%	39%	37%	43%	49%	35%	14%	8%	20%	5%	4%	8%	1.76	1.77	1.98
Other Meats (Hotdogs, Salami, Deli Meats)	24%	22%	17%	24%	35%	43%	43%	31%	25%	10%	12%	15%	2.38	2.34	2.38
Rice	24%	11%	17%	5%	26%	18%	52%	39%	43%	19%	24%	22%	2.67	2.77	2.69
Pasta	10%	11%	18%	29%	41%	28%	62%	32%	37%	0%	16%	17%	2.52	2.54	2.52
Fruits	0%	7%	5%	48%	26%	18%	29%	30%	49%	19%	38%	28%	2.57	2.99	3.00
Vegetables	10%	5%	3%	14%	18%	25%	38%	35%	38%	38%	42%	34%	3.05	3.14	3.03
Frozen Meals (Banquet Meals, Hot Pockets, frozen pizza, Eggo waffles)	14%	38%	43%	48%	39%	34%	14%	16%	22%	19%	7%	2%	2.29	1.92	1.82
Juice (cranberry, lemonade, apple, etc.)	10%	26%	17%	38%	24%	23%	33%	34%	38%	19%	16%	22%	2.62	2.41	2.65
Sports Drinks (Gatorade, PowerAde etc.)	38%	36%	32%	43%	28%	31%	19%	22%	22%	0%	14%	15%	1.81	2.12	2.20
Soft Drinks (Sprite, Pepsi, Mt. Dew etc.)	43%	51%	58%	33%	31%	23%	10%	14%	15%	5%	4%	3%	1.57	1.70	1.63
Bottled Water	29%	32%	17%	24%	18%	20%	19%	23%	23%	24%	27%	40%	2.29	2.45	2.86
Beer	19%	46%	55%	43%	32%	23%	14%	22%	20%	5%	0%	2%	1.67	1.76	1.68
Wine	48%	80%	82%	29%	15%	9%	5%	3%	9%	0%	3%	0%	1.19	1.28	1.28
Liquor	29%	42%	57%	38%	43%	29%	14%	14%	12%	0%	1%	2%	1.48	1.74	1.58
Coffee	29%	43%	42%	19%	15%	31%	5%	26%	15%	33%	16%	12%	2.14	2.15	1.98
Nuts	52%	35%	23%	38%	32%	37%	10%	24%	35%	0%	8%	5%	1.57	2.05	2.22
Snack Food (Chips, Crackers, Popcorn)	10%	15%	23%	33%	35%	25%	48%	38%	43%	10%	12%	9%	2.57	2.47	2.38
Sweets (Chocolate, Hard Candy, Cookies)	10%	19%	22%	48%	45%	25%	24%	28%	37%	19%	8%	17%	2.52	2.26	2.49
Baked Goods (Donuts, Cakes)	38%	42%	40%	38%	46%	43%	10%	11%	15%	5%	1%	2%	1.62	1.72	1.78
Baking Ingredients (Flour, Cooking oil, sugar, etc.)	14%	26%	31%	38%	41%	38%	33%	27%	28%	10%	7%	3%	2.29	2.15	2.03

The results from table 4, shown above, are rather inconclusive. There did not seem to be many significant differences between the diets of SNAP and non-SNAP users. We took particular interest in a few items such as fruits, vegetables, frozen meals, and snack foods, creating a crude basis of dietary health. Non-users did consume fruits more often, but vegetable consumption was almost identical. SNAP users reported eating slightly more snack food and frozen meals. This is shown in chart 2, and one can conclude that SNAP users spend more of their budget on cheap meals, while the other groups purchase expensive meat and poultry items often. So although SNAP users aren't using freed up funds to purchase fast food, they are using SNAP benefits to increase their purchases of unhealthy items at the grocery store, rather than



using the benefits to increase their vegetable and fruit consumption. The results also agreed with Mary K. Dinger and Alex Waigandt's 1995 study of college men's and women's food intake and physical exercise. Their results showed that almost 35% of students often consumed food in high excess of fats and sugar, similar to the whole population of SNAP users and non-users. SNAP users did report eating high levels of pasta and rice; a sign they are attempting to make cheap staple foods last them throughout the month. Table 5 shown below, highlights students other monthly expenditures as a percentage of their monthly budget.

Table 5	0-25% (1)			25-50% (2)			50-75% (3)			75-100% (4)			Average		
What percentage of your monthly expenditures is spent on the following:	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE
Clothes	76%	82%	88%	19%	11%	11%	0%	7%	2%	0%	0%	0%	1.14	1.24	1.14
Groceries	10%	24%	18%	33%	42%	43%	43%	26%	29%	14%	8%	9%	2.62	2.18	2.29
Utilities	43%	58%	68%	33%	32%	25%	14%	7%	8%	5%	3%	0%	0.02	1.54	1.40
Alcohol	71%	69%	80%	19%	27%	18%	0%	1%	2%	0%	3%	0%	1.10	1.38	1.22
Street Drugs (Marijuana, Cocaine, etc.)	81%	93%	92%	0%	4%	5%	5%	3%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0.95	1.09	1.11
Tobacco	81%	99%	98%	5%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.09	1.01	1.02
Entertainment	57%	47%	40%	33%	49%	46%	5%	4%	14%	0%	0%	0%	1.38	1.57	1.74
Eating out	48%	50%	37%	33%	41%	51%	10%	7%	12%	5%	3%	0%	1.62	1.62	1.75
Gas	48%	53%	54%	33%	36%	29%	14%	8%	14%	0%	3%	3%	1.57	1.61	1.66

This table gives us an insight into student's monthly expenditures. Students as a whole spent the highest percentage of their monthly expenditures on groceries, entertainment, eating out, and gas. Looking into the three subgroups you see that SNAP users spent a higher percentage of their monthly expenditures on groceries, with 57% of users spending between 50-100% of their monthly budget, while only 34% and 38% of non-users spent a similar percentage. Looking at entertainment you see that only 5% of SNAP users spent more than 50% of their monthly budget on entertainment compared to the 53% and 60% of non-users who did. This could be due to affluence of non-users, who may spend similar amount on groceries, but a lower percentage of their total expenditures. One can also see that non-users had a slightly higher

average on entertainment and eating out. This shows program efficiency, as it does not appear students are abusing SNAP to go see movies or dine at expensive restaurants. Table 6, shown below, begins to reveal student's general attitudes and self-perceptions of their dietary and lifestyle choices.

Table 6	Strongly Disagree (0)			Disagree (1)			Neutral (2)			Agree (3)			Strongly Agree (4)			Average		
How much do you agree with the following statements	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE
I make good dietary choices	0%	0%	5%	5%	11%	6%	24%	30%	28%	62%	51%	42%	10%	8%	20%	2.76	2.57	2.66
It is difficult to afford fruits and vegetables	5%	11%	11%	33%	36%	38%	24%	16%	20%	29%	27%	26%	10%	9%	5%	2.05	1.88	1.75
I exercise regularly	5%	5%	0%	0%	4%	12%	19%	16%	9%	29%	26%	28%	48%	49%	51%	3.14	3.08	3.17
I can prepare healthy, balanced meals	0%	1%	0%	5%	9%	9%	29%	27%	18%	43%	39%	45%	24%	23%	28%	2.86	2.73	2.91
I make nutritious food choices at the grocery store	0%	0%	2%	5%	5%	9%	19%	28%	26%	71%	46%	42%	5%	20%	22%	2.76	2.81	2.72
Typically, students eat very poorly	0%	0%	0%	19%	1%	3%	19%	16%	25%	43%	61%	42%	19%	22%	31%	2.62	3.03	3.00
Students usually eat foods with high fat content	0%	0%	0%	10%	1%	5%	29%	27%	18%	57%	59%	54%	5%	12%	23%	2.57	2.82	2.95
I repeatedly sacrifice nutrition for convenience	5%	5%	11%	38%	27%	20%	29%	31%	34%	24%	34%	32%	5%	3%	3%	1.86	2.01	1.97

The first four results show very little difference between the two subgroups. This reflects similarities in exercise, and self-confidence in purchasing/preparing meals with nutritious ingredients. For example, when asked if they agreed or strongly agreed about making nutritious food choices at the food store, SNAP participants averaged 2.76, with non-users averaging 2.81 and 2.72. This implies that the average student generally agreed with the statement.

The last three questions make statements about stereotypical student diets, previously referenced by Shive and Morris. In response to these questions, it seems as if SNAP users are optimistic to the quality of student diets, with 19% of users disagreeing with the statement, “Typically students eat very poorly”. Only 1 and 3% of ineligible/eligible non-users felt the same way. Additionally, on average, non-users agreed students typically eat more foods with high fat content. These assumptions could lead to the social stigma sometimes associated with SNAP

users. A question revolving around the associated stigma will be analyzed later in this empirical piece. The next table asks questions on college affordability, the effect of food choices on affordability, and the influence of work on a student's success. SNAP, according to theory, should make college more affordable by increasing student's budget constraint, increasing disposable income for college along with other goods. SNAP's effectiveness is enhanced by its connection to FWS, federal aid directed towards low-income individuals, allowing students to work a job flexible around their school schedule, increasing their chances of academic success. Table 7, below, presents us with some significant differences.

Table 7	Strongly Disagree (0)			Disagree (1)			Neutral (2)			Agree (3)			Strongly Agree (4)			Average		
How much do you agree with the following statements:	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE
College is very affordable	57%	50%	40%	33%	36%	42%	10%	11%	14%	0%	3%	2%	0%	0%	3%	0.52	0.66	0.86
Price played a strong role in my decision to attend college	5%	4%	11%	14%	19%	18%	33%	24%	25%	33%	31%	25%	14%	22%	22%	2.38	2.47	2.28
I find it difficult to afford college	5%	4%	5%	10%	14%	9%	10%	31%	38%	67%	39%	29%	10%	12%	18%	2.67	2.42	2.48
I receive monthly assistance from my parents or relatives	14%	4%	11%	14%	7%	12%	10%	16%	14%	38%	31%	32%	24%	42%	31%	2.43	3.00	2.60
It is difficult to afford food	0%	18%	9%	19%	35%	31%	43%	27%	40%	29%	19%	17%	10%	1%	3%	2.29	1.51	1.74
I eat poorly to save money	5%	26%	23%	52%	32%	38%	24%	26%	26%	14%	14%	9%	5%	3%	3%	1.62	1.35	1.31
I have trouble making utility and rent payments	10%	32%	42%	43%	43%	31%	29%	23%	22%	19%	1%	6%	0%	0%	0%	1.57	0.93	0.92
Federal-aid made it possible for me to go to college	0%	30%	5%	5%	16%	9%	5%	18%	18%	33%	23%	22%	57%	14%	46%	3.43	1.74	2.95
I was granted Federal Work Study	0%	53%	9%	10%	22%	6%	0%	8%	8%	24%	12%	25%	67%	5%	52%	3.48	0.96	3.05
I work 20 hours or more a week	24%	53%	37%	43%	31%	49%	10%	8%	5%	19%	3%	2%	5%	5%	8%	1.38	0.77	0.94
Works makes it difficult to focus on school	5%	28%	18%	48%	15%	42%	24%	30%	25%	19%	22%	11%	5%	5%	5%	1.71	1.61	1.42
I do better in school when I'm not working	0%	7%	9%	38%	15%	29%	33%	27%	29%	14%	38%	20%	14%	14%	12%	2.05	2.36	1.97
SNAP makes college more affordable for students	0%	16%	9%	5%	1%	8%	0%	51%	45%	14%	23%	18%	81%	8%	20%	3.71	2.05	2.32
If I had more money I would eat healthier	0%	5%	6%	5%	8%	8%	10%	16%	20%	38%	38%	25%	48%	32%	42%	3.29	2.84	2.88
Without government assistance I couldn't afford college	0%	19%	6%	10%	22%	9%	0%	26%	25%	19%	16%	15%	71%	18%	45%	3.52	1.92	2.83
I will graduate with a substantial amount of debt	0%	16%	5%	5%	19%	12%	5%	19%	15%	29%	23%	28%	62%	23%	40%	3.48	2.18	2.86

On average, SNAP recipients find it more difficult to afford college and receive less monthly assistance from their parents. This again shows SNAP's success in targeting the proper individuals. Participants also found it more difficult to afford food, felt stronger about government's role in affording college, with 81% strongly agreeing SNAP makes college more affordable compared to 8% and 20% of non-users. This shows SNAP's importance in making college an affordable option for students from low-income families. The last section of the survey attempts to determine student attitudes specific to SNAP. This section had several analytical difficulties, as some non-users were unaware of the program and chose not to answer. The results are presented in table 8 on the next page. Immediately below is a picture of the SNAP benefits card recipients use to purchase groceries.

Picture 1: Electronic Benefits Card



Table 8	Y			N			N/A		
Think of your personal attitudes towards student usage of SNAP.	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE	SNAP	NON	ELIGIBLE
Does SNAP make it easier for students to afford nutritious meals?	100%	53%	57%	0%	4%	6%	0%	43%	37%
Do you sense a stigma associated with SNAP usage?	52%	39%	29%	29%	15%	20%	19%	46%	51%
Do you believe SNAP benefits are too easy to obtain?	43%	28%	22%	52%	28%	35%	5%	43%	43%
Would you say SNAP participation increases food consumption?	76%	51%	49%	14%	3%	11%	10%	46%	40%
Does SNAP make college more affordable?	90%	53%	51%	10%	7%	6%	0%	41%	43%
Does SNAP usage influence students' diet?	90%	43%	49%	10%	9%	11%	0%	47%	40%
Do you believe college students should be eligible for SNAP?	95%	65%	69%	5%	5%	6%	0%	30%	25%
If benefits ended, would users still be able to afford food <i>at their current rate of consumption</i> ?	0%	8%	8%	95%	51%	57%	5%	41%	35%
Does SNAP encourage consumption of unhealthy items, such as alcohol, candy, or fast food?	5%	20%	20%	95%	32%	35%	0%	47%	45%
Does SNAP make it easier for students to afford recreational activities? (Movies, camping, golf)	81%	42%	48%	14%	7%	14%	5%	51%	38%
Are you aware of the supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps?	95%	55%	65%	5%	20%	18%	0%	24%	17%
Do you feel like people abuse SNAP benefits?	71%	38%	40%	24%	22%	23%	5%	41%	37%
Do you currently receive SNAP benefits?	100%	1%	6%	0%	72%	78%	0%	27%	15%
Have you ever received SNAP benefits?	100%	7%	12%	0%	65%	69%	0%	28%	18%
Are you currently on a school meal plan?	10%	24%	49%	90%	54%	49%	0%	22%	2%
Do you have easy access to a complete kitchen?	95%	70%	72%	5%	12%	25%	0%	18%	3%
Do you live off campus?	71%	34%	32%	29%	47%	68%	0%	19%	0%
Are you eligible for federally funded work study?	90%	0%	100%	10%	72%	0%	0%	28%	0%
Do you know anyone on SNAP?	95%	57%	51%	5%	20%	45%	0%	23%	5%
Do you believe SNAP eligibility requirements for college students should be tightened?	10%	14%	18%	86%	42%	46%	5%	45%	35%

The first notable result is the fact that 100% of SNAP users agree SNAP makes it easier to afford nutritious meals, while only 55% of non-users agreed. Other questions reaffirmed results from other sections; with 90% of SNAP users agreeing that SNAP makes college more affordable and influences a student diet. A crucial element is that 95% of users said they could not maintain their current rate of food consumption without benefits, clearly showing SNAP's impact on student's diets. Only 51 and 57% of non-users felt similarly, reflecting a big disparity between non-user's attitudes and user's reality. This disparity continued with 20% of non-users believing SNAP encouraged consumption of non-healthy items; while only 5% of users agreed. One interesting note is that 71% of SNAP users, compared to the 38 and 40% of non-users, believe other users abuse the benefits. It appears as if users believe they use the benefits properly, but suspect others abuse them. The next section provides a comprehensive analysis of the survey results, considering all tables and hypothesizes.

### **Policy Recommendations:**

After reviewing previous literature and relative academia several questions had been left unanswered: Is SNAP an effective program to improve dietary outcomes of a population with notoriously poor diets? Does the program target low income students effectively? Do students believe the program is abused? And the overarching question of, should eligibility requirements be tightened for students. Pacific University students provided a strong sample base of a 160 survey responses. By looking at sample averages of the three subgroups, these questions can be answered for the Pacific University population.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 all ask questions revolving around food security, dietary preferences, and student's ability to prepare a variety of meals. The three tables provide consistent results:

SNAP users, on average, suffer from higher levels of food insecurity compared to the general population. This includes not being able to afford more food and cutting the size of meals due to money. Although it may appear as if SNAP participants should have an easier time affording food, it is likely the general population spending overreaches users due to monthly support from relatives and parents. This is confirmed in table 6, question 4, with more non-users agreeing or strongly agreeing they received monthly support from their parents. This support seems to be greater than the SNAP benefits received by college students, which average around \$190 a month (SNAP Oregon). We also wanted to answer the questions if SNAP participation improved dietary outcomes. To measure this, consumption of fruits, vegetables, frozen meals, and snack food was used. SNAP users consumed similar amounts of fruits and vegetables; although their diets did consist of higher amounts of snack food and frozen meals. This increase in consumption could be SNAP user's attempts at buying cheap food in order make the benefits last the whole month.

One critique of SNAP usage by the general population is that users may suffer from a dietary pattern of over consumption at the beginning of the month; and suffering from poor diets at the end of the month. This creates an unhealthy balance and can lead to weight loss and other health problems. It is possible that college students suffer from the same crutch, eating balanced meals at the beginning of the month and switching to a diet of cheap frozen meals when their benefits run low.

Tables 6, 7, and 8 all ask general questions about college affordability, student health perceptions, and attitudes towards SNAP. Most responses were similar for both groups; a few that stood out was SNAP users felt much stronger about the importance of federal aid and the ability of SNAP to improve dietary outcomes. They also felt SNAP made college more

affordable. In table 8, as previously mentioned, 95% of students stated they could not maintain their current level of food consumption without SNAP benefits. This tells us SNAP has a significant impact on Pacific University student dietary outcomes. It also gave evidence confirming SNAP as an effective program to improve college affordability for low-income students. This being said; the majority of SNAP users and 39% and 29% of ineligible/eligible non-users felt a stigma associated with SNAP usage. So, although SNAP is an effective program for college students, there could still be improvements to how the benefits are used. If SNAP users refrain from purchasing unhealthy items, it is likely the sense of stigma and suspected program abuse will decrease. It is important to remember that these results are only representative of Pacific University, and possibly other small liberal arts college of similar size and demographics.

Another implication revolves around the similarity between the two non-users groups. Those eligible but not participating scored very similarly to those ineligible; suggesting that they didn't participate in the program because they didn't need the aid. This is a slight reflection on the inefficiencies surrounding work-study and concededly SNAP eligibility. If those eligible users did begin to participate it is possible signs of program abuse would begin to emerge.

Due to the comprehensive results of this research study several policy actions are necessary: The first recommendation is to continue offering SNAP benefits to college students. Additionally suggestions include tightening FWS requirements by declaring a strict income level. This will indirectly affect SNAP eligibility, efficiently selecting only the neediest students. A third recommendation would be to implement a mandatory, 1 credit food preparation, dietary, and budgeting class. Students would have to pass this class to receive benefits and would learn simple things such as the how to interpret dietary labels, shop efficiently, and prepare a few well



rounded meals. This will teach students to spend their benefits most effectively and will weed out the students who may not actually need the benefits. If these policies are implemented SNAP can continue to be an efficient and effective program.

**Conclusion:**

Since 1977, full time college students have been among the many beneficiaries of the second biggest welfare program in the United States. In the past decade student participation has doubled, increasing interest in usage. College students represent a unique population; as many students are still dependent on their parents for monthly support. This has caused controversy; with some critics asking why taxpayer funds should be used to support weekend partying for students coming from affluent families. Research on student usage is sparse; prompting this empirical study of Pacific University students. The sample size consisted of both SNAP users and non-users and by comparing sample averages of these three sub-groups we are able to come to several important conclusions and in turn policy recommendations: The first one is that SNAP users at Pacific University were targeted efficiently; with many SNAP users still suffering from food insecurity, reflecting a legitimate need for benefits. The second conclusion we came to is SNAP users still follow typical college student dietary patterns, consuming similar amounts of vegetables and fruits as the general population. SNAP users were less likely to spend money on entertainment and fast food, although their diets typically consisted of more unhealthy foods such as snack food and frozen meals.

We continued to determine that in general SNAP increased food consumption, although typically the benefits were not enough to fully satisfy student's dietary wants. It is important here to consider the difference between wants and needs. Just because a student can't always eat the food they want does not mean they are malnourished. It is important to teach students proper

dietary patterns; as their current tendencies are likely to stick throughout their adult life. In some cases SNAP did impact student's nutrition, as one student stated, "Last year I didn't have SNAP and couldn't afford to eat. I was always hungry and had no energy. Having SNAP makes life a lot easier" (Response # 132). Having no energy can clearly impact one's success in school, and this is just one example of how SNAP influenced students' diets and its ability to improve students' chances of success. Although several limitations in the study do exist, it can be said that, looking at Pacific Students, SNAP meets the program goals of increasing food security and nutritional outcomes. Due to these results; the previously stated recommendations should be implemented so SNAP can continue to flourish as one of the nation's most successful welfare programs.

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